

MWF Testimony on HB 285

Mr Chairman, members of the committee,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the conservation director for state and national issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation.

Once again, MWF rises in opposition to a bill which seeks to set seasons and permits for elk. As we have throughout the session, we strongly oppose legislative attempts to set permits and perform an end run around the Commission and the popular public process that establishes seasons. Bills such as HB 285 and HB 361 set a dangerous precedent which the legislature has resisted for many, many years. In fact, I would note that it was the legislature that took itself out of the season setting process by instituting the Game and Fish Commission. That removal of political influence has been one of the wisest decisions ever made. Now, when a small group of people wish to put profits ahead of the resource, we see more and more attempts to legislate wildlife management.

This bill is an attempt by some to get a bigger piece of the pie than the resource can stand. Places such as the Elkhorns, the West Fork of the Bitterroot, and in fact, any area that has permits for archery hunting at risk of overcrowding, and tipping the balance between harvest and conservation far in favor of excessive harvest. It further restricts archers to only hunting one area when they do draw a permit. The proposed amendments do nothing to make this bill more palatable, and in fact, make this bill even more unworkable, cumbersome, and as is usual with last minutes attempts to save a deeply flawed bill, just do not make sense.

As testimony opposed has shown, the sporting community is greatly unified in their opposition to this bill. We ask you to resist any attempts to legislate season setting, resist any amendments, and just vote no on HB 285.